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STATE FOR NEA/ARP, LONDON FOR TSOU, PARIS FOR ZEYA

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [KU](#) [FREEDOM](#) [AGENDA](#) [NATIONAL](#) [ASSEMBLY](#)  
SUBJECT: FREEDOM AGENDA: PARLIAMENT POSTPONES DISCUSSION OF  
ELECTORAL REFORM; GOVERNMENT PRESSURED TO ACT

REF: A. KUWAIT 893  
[B](#). KUWAIT 892  
[C](#). KUWAIT 891  
[D](#). KUWAIT 636

[1](#). (U) On April 17, Parliament unanimously approved a Government motion to postpone discussion on proposals to reduce the number of electoral constituencies, a key political reform, until May 15. Parliament previously voted to discuss the proposals on April 17 (ref D), but agreed to the postponement after the Government failed to submit its report and recommendation on the issue to Parliament. Prime Minister Shaykh Nasser Mohammed Al-Sabah told parliamentarians (MPs) the Cabinet needed more time to review the "technical aspects" of a 241-page report recently completed by an ad hoc ministerial committee reviewing the issue. He emphasized, however, the Government's "seriousness" in resolving this "vital and important issue."

[2](#). (SBU) While agreeing to the one-month postponement, many MPs warned the Government against stalling on the reform and called on the Cabinet to submit a "serious reduction proposal." Citing leaked information on the ministerial committee's report, several MPs accused the Government of sectarian gerrymandering and violating Article 29 of the Kuwaiti Constitution, which states, "All people are equal in human dignity, and in public rights and duties before the law, without distinction as to race, origin, language, or religion." One MP argued that "the ministerial committee has divided the country based on sectarian affiliations."

[3](#). (SBU) Parliament also approved a motion calling on the Government to submit its report to Parliament "in a timely fashion" to give the Defense and Interior Affairs Committee sufficient time to draft its own report before the May 15 session. The motion passed with Government support 42 to 16; those voting against the motion were primarily from Parliament's Independent Bloc, a coalition of "service deputy" MPs who strongly oppose the reduction.

[4](#). (SBU) The Government is increasingly under pressure to act on reducing the number of electoral constituencies. Almost daily seminars hosted by political associations, NGOs, and individual diwanis on the subject suggest growing public support for the reform. A recent survey by the local Arabic daily Al-Watan showed 86% supporting electoral reform. Sixty-three percent of those surveyed supported five constituencies and 87% said they believed the reduction would prevent electoral corruption.

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